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IN THIS  
ISSUE:

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COMMUNICATIONS  
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*Executive Director:  
the time to focus new  
funds is now*

*Grant to provide huge  
boost to Arizona's  
public safety commu-  
nications initiatives*

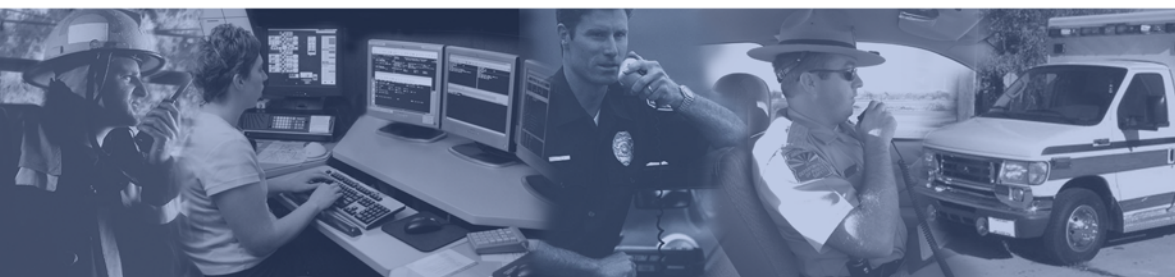
*Model interoperable  
radio system debuts  
in Yuma*

*Evelyn Jablonski a  
key member of the  
PSCC Support Office*

*Cell phones continue  
to fail first respond-  
ers in large-scale  
disasters*

## Our Mission:

To enable real-time, interoperable communications between local, county, state, tribal, and federal public safety entities in the State of Arizona to effectively protect lives and property.



PSCC

### Harnessing the power of new funds



**Curt Knight**

This reality could also make it very difficult for public safety planners in Arizona to meet Governor Janet Napolitano's newly announced and much more aggressive timeline for having the state's major metropolitan areas fully interoperable within just two years.

After all, if the incredible sums of money becoming available for public safety communications in Arizona are allocated simultaneously to unrelated, isolated attempts to advance interoperability within the state, the tremendous impact the new money could have on a common, collaborative effort would be weakened.

This is especially true if new funds are allocated to several different attempts to advance first responder radio interoperability in Arizona based on varying philosophies, approaches and technical standards.

To help Arizona citizens and first responders get the very most from the new monies becoming available for public safety communications, we need to begin carefully focusing new funds for use in a common statewide effort.

Thankfully, the technical standards for this ongoing statewide effort have already been defined after, among other things, an exhaustive review of first responder needs in Arizona and advanced interoperable communications systems that will stand the test of time.

Funneling money towards a statewide effort, albeit large and complex, is a smart move that will help ensure money is not wasted by addressing various and sometimes unrelated forms of interoperability across the state.

While small, disparate pockets of first responder radio interoperability in Arizona could probably be realized or improved with the new funds becoming available, such pockets could easily fail or become unstable during any large-scale, catastrophic emergency where first responders from outside the interoperable region, or pocket, must be drawn in.

The time to start focusing funds towards the developing statewide interoperability solution, designed to perform anywhere in the state during any type of emergency, is now.



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## Grant to provide huge boost to Arizona's public safety communications initiatives

*Federal approval of Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan will get state \$17.7 million*

This past summer, Arizona became eligible to receive a substantial amount of funds, totaling \$17.7 million, for use in advancing public safety communications within the state.

The availability of the money, through a unique Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program, has been serving as a substantial source of excitement for the Arizona Public Safety Communications Commission (PSCC) and everyone else involved in the ongoing effort to dramatically advance Arizona's emergency services communications systems.

Part of the excitement within the public safety community arises from the fact that the funds can only be used for communications related projects.

"Most public safety grants of this size, especially homeland security monies, can aid public safety communications projects but are also earmarked for items like specialized public safety vehicles and personal protection equipment for first responders," said Curt Knight, Executive Director of the PSCC. "The fact that this large sum of money is earmarked exclusively for advancing public safety communications is very encouraging."

The \$17.7 million, some of which could be available within six months, would provide Arizona with the means to substantially build upon, within a short period of time, the momentum it

has already generated in the effort to develop modern, advanced public safety interoperable radio systems in the state.

The money, part of roughly \$1 billion to be distributed to U.S. States and Territories through the federal grant program, would also make it much easier to meet Governor Janet Napolitano's newly announced timeline for having Arizona's major metropolitan areas fully interoperable within just two years.

Receipt of the much-needed funds in Arizona will be contingent on the successful completion, submission and federal approval of a Statewide Communications Interoperability Plan (SCIP) and related Investment Justifications.

These vitally important items, after months of detailed, difficult work by various entities, are nearing finalization as they must be submitted to the Federal Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by December 3, 2007, for Arizona to be considered for the funds.

Because the money will come from the strict PSIC Grant Program, it can't be used to support single agency projects whose emphasis is on the internal communications needs of one agency.

The money is intended to be used to advance public safety radio communications through its use in projects that are multi-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

## Model interoperable communications system debuts in Yuma

After four years of work, the new Yuma Regional Communications System (YRCS) was inaugurated on May 31 at a ceremony hosted by the City of Yuma in their Council Chambers.

The interoperable public safety radio system, one of the newest and most advanced in Arizona, features the same technology standards adopted by the Arizona Public Safety Communications Commission (PSCC) this past spring for use in building out a statewide interoperability solution.

"The new system in Yuma is truly a model of a great, modern interoperable radio system," said Curt Knight, Executive Director of the PSCC. "Its advanced, conforming structure will allow it to possibly become much more than the already superb system it is today and impact the quality of first responder radio interoperability beyond its current coverage area."

In other words, Knight believes the model Yuma system could become an integral piece of a much larger statewide interoperable

communications system made up of multiple interoperable systems like it (the system of systems approach).

Because it carries the same "DNA" as the defined statewide interoperability solution, the Yuma system has already been included in the PSCC's vital interoperability demonstration project.

Participants in the system, half of which was funded by grants, were present at the inauguration ceremony on May 31 to receive their first portable radio to access the system. The YRCS will initially go into operation with about 1,200 radios and is expected to grow rapidly as others come on board.

Present at the inauguration ceremony were representatives from the Yuma City Council, Yuma Police and Fire Departments, Yuma County Sheriff, Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS), Cocopah Law Enforcement, San Luis Public Safety, Somerton Police and Fire, Rural Metro, Marine Corp

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



## New Yuma Radio System ...

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Air Station, Yuma Proving Ground, Yuma Sector Border Patrol, San Diego County Sheriff, Imperial County Sheriff, Santa Cruz County, Tubac Fire District, FBI, Mexicali, Mexico agencies, the City Administrator of El Centro, board members from Imperial Valley Emergency Communications Association, and many others. Members of the Motorola implementation project team, the selected vendor, were also present.

"This is a huge partnership," stated Greg Wilkinson, Assistant Information Technology Director for Telecommunications for the City of Yuma, who has worked continually over the last four years to make this happen. "Finally, everyone in the surrounding area concerned with public safety will have the ability to communicate with each other. Plus, it will save money in the

Border Patrol, and even with public safety agencies in San Luis Rio Colorado as emergency situations occur that require multi-jurisdiction attention. None of this was possible in the past.

"This is a great accomplishment for Wilkinson and his work team in that they are the first to accomplish the implementation of a joint City and County communication system in our state," said City of Yuma ITS Director Laurie Neinast. "Congratulations to all parties involved who helped make this happen."

After describing the system to those in attendance at the July 10 PSCC meeting, Wilkinson presented Curt Knight with a radio that can be used to access the system as a token of appreciation for the PSCC's past and future support of the project.

Knight said that, in reality, the PSCC did not contribute much to the effort that made the new Yuma system a reality, but that it will be contributing to the future activities and key expansions

involving the system that could greatly expand its role in advancing interoperability statewide.

"The PSCC's approach to the Yuma system from here on out will be to provide additional funds and support for expanding

**The new Yuma radio system is providing the type of high-quality, reliable interoperability to first responders in the region that the PSCC envisions for the entire state.**

the system in order to build upon its already great coverage and capacity," Knight said. "The philosophy behind this is in line with the PSCC's desire to create a cost-effective, shared environment of improved interagency communications where dramatic progress has already been made."

Enhancements to the Yuma system through the PSCC-funded demonstration project are already in the works, including building a 700 MHz site on Oatman Mountain to expand eastern the coverage of the system. The PSCC's demonstration project will also connect the Yuma system to the expansive Phoenix metro system which will demonstrate unprecedented roaming and other intersystem capabilities, as well as identify additional governance and system management issues.

"The Yuma system's advanced characteristics are already allowing it to be leveraged and mirrored in the design and construction of a statewide, interoperable, public safety radio system," Knight said. "There is no doubt that this trend will continue, especially because the system is providing the type of high-quality, reliable interoperability to first responders in the region that the PSCC envisions for the entire state."

The system means the City of Yuma Fire and Police Departments can immediately communicate by radio with the Yuma County Sheriff, Imperial County Sheriff,

long run by only having to support one system and employ one group of technical support staff instead of supporting multiple systems with multiple sets of support staff."

Wilkinson provided a detailed description of the new Yuma system to those in attendance at the July 10 PSCC meeting.

At the meeting, Wilkinson said the new system already interfaces YRCS users into the Imperial and San Diego County's system for mutual aid responses. The three entities recently signed an Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) to formalize this partnership. On the federal side, interfaces to the new Border Patrol, Customs, and Port Authority system are being planned. Interfaces to agencies in Mexico are also planned.

In addition to grant funds, the system was paid for by the City of Yuma and Yuma County. San Luis has constructed a tower site and Somerton will be contributing repeater equipment. Other municipalities and agencies participated in completing the system by other types of contributions.

The system means the City of Yuma Fire and Police Departments can immediately communicate by radio with the Yuma County Sheriff, Imperial County Sheriff,



## PSCC finds dedicated administrative dynamo in Evelyn Jablonski

When a person envisions a world-class executive assistant capable of handling virtually any office challenge and always finding a way to do so in a manner that exudes extreme professionalism, an image of Evelyn Jablonski should pop into their head.

One of the most widely utilized members of the Arizona Public Safety Communications Commission (PSCC) Support Office, Jablonski is responsible for everything from the PSSC's website to creating, editing, reviewing, and distributing official

PSCC correspondence, meeting packets, agendas and minutes.

"If a product the

tant house and senate bills related to the PSSC's efforts and inform her boss and others within the PSSC of their status.

"Compared to when I first started with the PSSC more than two years ago, the pace has really started to pick up to the point where there is never a dull moment," said Jablonski, who would have done anything to sabotage the effort to have this feature article written about her.

Jablonski also performs many of the same activities mentioned above for the Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC).

She said the hardest part of her current job is not necessarily all of the work, but just trying to fully understand the multifaceted, dynamic, and often technical nature of the telecommu-

nications project the PSSC is charged with overseeing.

When she first started with the PSSC, she said she

only remotely understood the concept of radio interoperability.

"I also had no background in telecommunications and did not know the movement to advance Arizona's emergency services communications system was so complex," Jablonski said. "There was a big learning curve for me to address but I eventually caught on and am still learning something new about the world of telecommunications each day."

Although most of her career with DPS prior to joining the PSSC was spent assigned to Facilities, Jablonski actually began her DPS career in 1997 as an office assistant assigned to the agency's Supply Section.

Because the PSSC operates under the DPS organizational umbrella, Jablonski recently celebrated her 10-year anniversary with the agency and was given a service pin to commemorate the occasion by DPS Deputy Director David Felix at the July 10 PSSC meeting in Flagstaff.

It was just a month after beginning her DPS career in the agency's Supply Section that Jablonski accepted an assignment as an administrative secretary and transferred to Facilities where she was awarded the Bureau's 1998 Employee of the Year Award, and in 2002, was part of a work group that earned a

When I first started with the PSSC, I never thought I would become so impassioned about this project.

PSCC Support Office puts out, especially a written product, is highly professional, done exactly on time, and mis-



**Evelyn Jablonski**

take free, Evelyn probably had her hand in it," said Curt Knight, Executive Director of the PSSC.

The top-notch administrative skills Jablonski brought to the PSSC Support Office in 2005 were honed during the nearly 8 years she spent as an administrative secretary within the bustling Facilities Management Bureau of the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS).

In addition to the myriad of services she provides to the PSSC that were mentioned above, Jablonski is also responsible for tracking and maintaining copies of virtually all important PSSC records, including employee and commissioner records, and making sure the PSSC Support Office is always stocked with necessary office supplies and functioning equipment.

She also helps Knight and others within the Support Office manage complex meeting schedules and travel arrangements.

It is also not uncommon for Jablonski, a very humble and self-admittedly shy Arizona native, to research and track impor-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

## Cell phones continue to fail first responders in major emergencies

*Problem highlights need for real interoperable emergency services radio system in Arizona*

The tragic bridge collapse that took place in Minneapolis on August 1, 2007, is yet another recent example of why first responders and anyone else closely tied to the effectiveness of a public safety response should not rely on commercial wireless devices, especially cellular phones, in a disaster.

"It's pretty ironic that just when a person needs a cell phone most, it might not work," said Curt Knight, Executive Director of the Arizona Public Safety Communications Commission (PSCC).

What usually happens near an emergency scene of catastrophic proportion like the one in Minneapolis is a disruption in cellular service because everyone begins using their cellular devices at the same time.

"Thousands of citizens begin calling loved ones to make sure they are not injured while first responders begin using cellular phones to do things like mobilize doctors, give information to city officials, and even communicate with other first responders who may not be on the same emergency services radio system they are," Knight said.

The thousands upon thousands of simultaneous calls and incredibly high volume of calls can easily overload commercial cellular networks which are very limited in capacity and typically built only to meet anticipated everyday cellular demand.

A real solution for cellular dependent consumers and first responders is not in sight because, in the end, cellular companies operate to generate profits. As a result, no company would want to spend billions of dollars to construct tremendous amounts of additional capacity in every one of its markets just for use in an emergency that may never take place.

In addition, cellular phone service consumers probably wouldn't be willing to pay the much higher cell phone bills that would result.

Knight said members of the general public would probably be very surprised and shocked to learn just how much first responders have come to rely on their commercial cel-



### Failing when needed most

*The tragic bridge collapse in Minneapolis provided the most recent example of why first responders can't count on cell phones during major disasters.*

lular phones, which could easily fail in an emergency, for supplementing their various on-duty communications needs.

"The fact that first responders have come to rely on their cellular phones for so much definitely creates substantial risks for the public and the first responders themselves," said Knight, adding that commercial cellular networks will never be designed for everyone to use their phone at the same time.

Cell phone congestion did block many first responder calls near the collapsed bridge on August 1, causing Minneapolis police to actually ask people to get off their phones.

Cell phone congestion also blocked countless numbers of calls placed by first responders, students, and others during the April 16 shooting tragedy at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. The congestion there added to the extreme chaos and confusion during the shooting which resulted in the deaths of 32 people and ultimately became the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history.

Of course, the most high profile incidents that led to substantial mobile phone-service outages for first responders and others included Hurricane Katrina, the London subway bombings, the 2003 electrical blackout in the Northeast United States, and, of course, the 9/11 attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C.

"It is very important for those in the first responder community to remember that our cell phones will prove to be unreliable in a major emergency," said Tracy Montgomery, the Assistant Police Chief of the Phoenix Police Department who also serves as a commissioner with the PSCC.

"Loss of cell phone service during disasters and other emergencies has been a constant problem and is affirming of the PSCC's continued efforts towards real emergency services radio interoperability for Arizona," said Montgomery.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7





## Cell Phone Failures ...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

After all, the better the emergency services communications system that is constructed in Arizona through the work of the PSCC and others, the less first responders in the state will have to depend on unreliable commercial communications networks for supplemental, or even basic, emergency services communications.

"Our goal is to keep moving forward in building an emergency services communications system that meets all of the critical everyday needs of first responders in Arizona and is also designed and tested to outperform in a catastrophic emergency," Knight said.

An easy step for public safety executives in Arizona to take now in anticipation of cellular phone outages in an emergency, according to Montgomery, is to determine ahead of time what radio frequencies to use for high-level emergency services com-

munications.

"Land lines would likely still be intact in an emergency, but communication with city management and other high-level executives who are also critical to an emergency response would be difficult without cell phones," said Montgomery, adding that pre-determined frequencies and a plan to get mobile radios in the hands of executives is a smart move that can be made to-day.

All immediate progress towards emergency preparation in Arizona, including the type realized through exercises like TOPOFF and National Incident Management System compliance, is also very beneficial.

Emergency preparation related to communications issues is especially important until Arizona's emergency services communication system advances to the point where first responders and others instrumental in a disaster response no longer have to rely so heavily on cellular phones.

## Jablonski ...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

prestigious DPS Director's Unit Citation Award.

She remained in Facilities until 2005 when, following her promotion to executive assistant, she was assigned to the PSCC which, at the time, was still in its infancy.

Having worked very hard to support the mission of the PSCC five days a week for the past two and a half years, Jablonski said she has become quite attached, on a personal level, to the effort to advance Arizona's emergency services communications system.

"When I first started with the PSCC, I never thought I would become so impassioned about this project," Jablonski said. "It will be rewarding for everyone involved in the PSCC's efforts, including myself, to see all first responders in Arizona gain access to a public safety radio system that meets all of their interoperability needs. This effort will make our state so much better prepared to handle large-scale emergencies."

When she is not at her home away from home in the PSCC Support Office near 22nd Avenue and Encanto Boulevard in Phoenix, Jablonski is spending quality time with her husband, David, and two daughters, Gabrielle, 12, and Dominique, 7.

Jablonski, who has five sisters and four brothers, all of whom reside in Arizona along with her parents, also might be seen on the weekends reading books, playing tennis, and hiking.

## Grant program ...

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jurisdictional and/or regional in scope.

In anticipation of Arizona receiving the \$17.7 million, the PSCC and other entities have been working closely together to focus the expected funds as productively as possible so they will benefit the most first responders and citizens in the state.

Focused use of the new funds, for example, could help replace Arizona's statewide microwave system and help finance the expansion of existing, modern public safety radio systems in the state so they can serve more public safety providers.

The important deadline of December 3, 2007 for submitting the SCIP document to DHS is approaching quickly, but there are still opportunities to provide input to the final plan.

Multi-jurisdictional feedback and input from public safety entities across Arizona regarding the plan has made it the comprehensive document it is and helped substantiate the critical need for much more than the currently allocated \$17.7 million toward Arizona's communications needs.


To learn more about the current status of the SCIP document and provide last-minute input, it is recommended that you attend the Oct. 23 and Nov. 20 Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC) and PSCC meetings.

For details about these and future meetings, please visit the PSCC website at [www.azdps.gov/pssc](http://www.azdps.gov/pssc)



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